

REWARD

By Mike Harris

Because I am a product of the Great Depression, when I heard of the topic for today, my first thought, MONEY. Upon reflection I realized that was not necessarily the only reward. The diploma of a high school or college graduation was a personal reward denoting completion of years of effort. The receiving of a medal for heroism while serving in World War II was also a reward, a word of praise from someone respected was also a reward. With so many interpretations where to go? Something of a dilemma, since I have had a very long and full life, which of these rewards really were important, initially and lastingly?

Upon reflection two rewards that my partner and I recalled and talked about privately jumped to the forefront. The first was when a teacher made the effort to seek me out at my place of employment. She came and asked could she see Mr. Harris? I was pointed out to her and the following took place. "I am Mr. Harris. What can I do for you?" "I am your son's teacher." "What has he done now?" "Mr. Harris, I have been a teacher for almost twenty years, and I have never had a more polite student in all these years. I just thought I would like to meet his parent and tell him or her what a pleasure it is to have him in my class. Thank you!" With that she turned and left. I stood absolutely stunned. That evening when I got home I could not wait to tell my wife what had happened. Her comment was, "I guess we did a pretty good job with Ricky." "Mostly your doing," my reply. This was a reward we shared often in our private times.

The second incident happened soon after we relocated from the farm to the suburban community of Norristown, PA. With the children settled in the local public schools, my daughter in sixth grade. On a given day she was in her place in the schoolroom. The teacher was conducting a class in composition, on the blackboard was a sentence. In the course of explaining that words had titles that denoted their meaning by how and where they appeared in a sentence, she said it was called "parsing" a sentence.

Does anyone in the class know how to "parse" a sentence? Dead silence. Eddie raised her hand! The teacher asked her to come to the blackboard, gave her the chalk, and directed her to proceed to parse the sentence. Eddie confidently proceeded and divided the sentence into subject and predicate, then broke down the subject, article, adjective and noun, action verb jumped over adverb, article, noun. "The red fox jumped over the fence." The teacher was quite surprised that a new student from a rural one-room school had done something that none of the students even had the least notion of what Eddie had just done. The teacher asked "Where did you learn to do that?" "My father taught me," and with that sat down. That evening Eddie related what had happened and my wife commented, "That's your helping with lessons." "Only because you insist that it is part of my job in raising our children. It is not all one way." Later privately we talked and both of us felt rewarded and were equally proud that our children were up to the standard of the city school they were now attending.